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THIS STORY

## Reverend Raven hopes to keep playing the blues forever

By Dave Tianen  
Journal Sentinel pop music critic

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It's just three songs into Reverend Raven's set at Mustang Shelly's and already the night air is starting to burn. One of the guys at the table to the right of the stage is keeping time on a beer bottle with his cigarette lighter.

The Reverend joined the blues congregation rather late in life. He was a chief petty officer in the Navy with 15 years of service when, at age 39, he decided to quit to play the blues full time. It was a choice his military superiors didn't readily understand.

"I was really scared. The admiral called me in for a counseling session. 'What are you doing?' he wanted to know."

The admiral needn't have worried. Today Reverend Raven, 45, and his Chain-Smoking Altar Boys are doing very well for themselves. They're playing as often as 15 times a month, cutting a swath across the country's midsection that stretches from Detroit to Iowa, from Memphis to Minneapolis.

The band cut an album, "Slow Burn," in 1998 and hopes to have another disc out by summer. The Reverend also expect to have a record deal in place by that time.

In an era of flamboyant Stevie Ray style gunslingers, the Reverend plays his blues close-to-the-bone Chicago style. A typical Reverend Raven set is one-quarter originals and the balance covers - but not the usual suspects. The chain-smoking Altar Boys lean toward obscurities. They're big on Slim Harpo. Hollywood Fats. The Reverend grew up in Chicago listening to Louis Jordan and Muddy Waters. He claims seeing the great Texas guitarist Freddy King made him want to be a musician.

The lineup of the Altar Boys consists of Chuck Might on keyboards, Spencer Panosh on drums, True Rittgers on bass, Madison Slim on harmonica and vocals and the Reverend on lead guitar and vocals.

Madison Slim has an impressive resume; he spent six years playing with the great Chicago guitarist Jimmy Rogers. The Altar Boys give him lots of room to shine on vocals and harp.

"We are co-front men," Reverend Raven says. "I believe in ensembles. I like that traditional mix."

### Hear it here



Reverend Raven

Listen to Real Audio of Reverend Raven's song "Slow Burn." [Go to Song](#)